

2 Spies Cross Line To Freedom

STAT

LAWYER GIVEN CLOAK, DAGGER ASSIGNMENT

13th Of Series

The letter from East Germany bore the usual return address; Eisenacher Strasse, No. 22, Leipzig. In his law office at 161 William St., overlooking the East River, 19 floors above the shaded canyons of lower Manhattan, James Donovan tore it open carefully.

He was not disappointed. The familiar signature read:

"Hellen Abel."

Donovan scanned the letter, and his eyes opened wide.

He did not know that it was the beginning of a trail that would lead him to East Berlin's an adventure that would rival The Third Man.

The letter was dated May 8, 1961.

"Thinking over the question ...," Hellen Abel wrote, "I remembered of the letter sent to my husband last year by the father of the pilot Powers. I have not read it, but if I am not mistaken, he suggested to my husband that some mutual actions be taken to help his son and my husband be released."

"Mrs. Abel" went on in the letter to seek Donovan's advice. Would an exchange be possible?

Donovan put it in an envelope, as he had the others, and addressed it to Lawrence R. Hou-

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STRANGE GAME

The letter was the first key move in a strange game that had opened almost the moment Powers was captured near Sverdlovsk.

The object of the game was to swap Francis Gary Powers for the alleged husband of "Hellen Abel" — Rudolf Ivanovich Abel, the Soviet master spy then serving a sentence of 30 years in a federal prison.

Abel, the highest-ranking spy ever caught in this United States, was convicted of espionage in October, 1957, despite a brilliant defense by Donovan. His court-appointed attorney.

The Soviet spy was sent to Atlanta Penitentiary.

Abel had promised Donovan a \$10,000 fee, which Donovan had pledged to three universities.

When he asked for the fee, Abel said, "Write to my wife in Leipzig."

Donovan did, and correspondence began between 161 William St. and No. 22 Eisenacher Strasse.

Then, to 161 William St., came the letter of May 8, 1961, in which "Mrs. Abel" suggested an exchange for Powers.

As each letter had arrived from "Hellen Abel" it was relayed by Donovan to Houston. The CIA prepared the answer for "Mrs. Abel" and mailed the letter back to New York, where Donovan sent it off to Leipzig.

In November, the CIA approved a draft of a letter to "Hellen Abel" agreeing flatly to a swap.

The first week in January, 1962, Donovan's bag was packed and he was itching for word from the CIA to fly to Berlin.

Finally, late in January, Donovan received authority. On Feb. 2 he flew to West Berlin.

A CALL

The same day, the warden at Atlanta received a telephone call from Washington instructing him to be sure Abel had presentable clothing, because he might be brought to New York for routine questioning.

In West Berlin, Donovan lived alone for nine days in a house

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